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INFO RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU 8674  
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 7556  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD 1264  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 9319  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1512  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L DHAKA 005766

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/11/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KCRM](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: NGO WORKERS ARRESTED IN ADVANCE OF OPPOSITION  
PROGRAM

REF: A. 04 DHAKA 01647

[1](#)B. 05 DHAKA 013

Classified By: A/DCM D.C. McCullough, Reason(s): 1.4 (b)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Police across Bangladesh have arrested at least 100 members of Proshika, a giant human development NGO, to prevent them from participating in upcoming anti-government programs organized by the opposition Awami League. According to press reports, the Proshika members were arrested without warrant on the grounds they were involved in "anti-state activities."

[1](#)2. (SBU) On September 11, Proshika Legal Chief Abu Syeed told poloff that 132 Proshika members are in police custody "but we don't know why Proshika has been targeted." He insisted that Proshika is involved only in human development work, such as empowering women in rural areas, and that "we are not a political party."

[1](#)3. (C) Deputy Inspector General of Police Baharul Alam maintained that the Proshika members were arrested following "intelligence reports that Proshika was planning to create destruction in the next few days and we are interrogating them" about this. Asked about their NGO status, he told us that they are "unlike other NGOs in that they are involved in political activities and are not exactly what they portray themselves to be." While there are no direct links to the Awami League, Alam said, Proshika leader Dr. Qazi Farroq Ahmed's thinking is "akin to that of the opposition political party."

[1](#)4. (SBU) Proshika chairman Qazi Farooq is out of the country, but his deputy denied to reporters that Proshika has any link to the opposition's political program.

[1](#)5. (SBU) On September 12, the Awami League-led opposition alliance will march towards the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in downtown Dhaka. The GOB has imposed a ban for that day on any kind of gathering, procession, or demonstration in a broad areas surrounding the PMO. Senior Awami League leaders have confirmed to us they intend to challenge police barricades erected to deny them access to those areas. On September 18, the Awami League plans a mass rally in Dhaka to announce its next series of anti-government activities.

[1](#)6. (C) Comment: The new police action against Proshika indicates growing GOB anxiety about Awami League street agitation. With some reason, the BNP has long seen Proshika as an adversary. Beginning in 2002. the GOB froze Proshika's

foreign funding, filed sedition, corruption, and other apparently baseless charges against Proshika chairman Farooq were eventually dropped, and in 2004 it arrested hundreds of Proshika members for providing logistical support to demonstrations demanding the GOB's resignation by the end of April. Farooq stoutly denies any political agenda. He blames Proshika's GOB woes on Jamaat Islami disinformation and "false" BNP perceptions (shared by many foreign monitors) that Proshika's 2001 poll watchers were anti-BNP/Jamaat. In typical Bangladesh fashion, instead of pursuing appropriate legal sanctions against Proshika, the GOB resorted to various forms of extra-legal harassment.

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